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New York

President:	Mr. Ibrahim	(Malaysia)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Moura Lucas
	Chad	Mr. Gombo
	Chile	Mr. Olguín Cigarroa
	China	Mr. Xu Zhongsheng
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Jordan	Mrs. Kawar
	Lithuania	Mrs. Jakubonė
	New Zealand	Mr. Van Bohemen
	Nigeria	Mr. Adamu
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Spain	Mr. González de Linares Palou
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Ramírez Carreño

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. Feltman.

Mr. Feltman: Let me open with my best wishes to our Muslim colleagues on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadam — Ramadan Kareem.

The Secretary-General is encouraged by the recent affirmations by Prime Minister Netanyahu of his commitment to "the idea of a sustainable two-State solution", but notes that this must be translated into actions. This includes a halt to sensitive and unilateral activities in the West Bank, including settlements, that could prejudice a final status agreement or prevent the establishment of a viable, contiguous Palestinian State. That message was reaffirmed by major donor countries at the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for assistance to the Palestinians held in Brussels on 27 May.

The Secretary-General welcomes the measures taken by Israel to ease some restrictions on Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, in particular during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, although some have been revoked in response to repeated rocket fire from Gaza. He encourages Israel to sustain and expand those confidence-building measures, which enable the legitimate movement of people and goods in and between Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and improve the quality of life of Palestinians.

The security situation in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, remained tense. A total of 186 Palestinians, including 28 children and two women, were injured. Five members of the Israeli security forces were also injured. The Israeli security forces conducted approximately 400 search-and-arrest operations, resulting in the arrest of 510 Palestinians. In three separate incidents, on 20 May, 10 June and 14 June, three Palestinian men were shot and killed by the Israeli security forces. First, a man was killed when an Israeli military Jeep overturned during an operation to arrest suspected militants. The second incident occurred as a result of clashes with Israeli military forces. The third man was killed after ramming his vehicle into two Israeli policewomen.

On 19 June, a Palestinian shot at an Israeli vehicle travelling near a West Bank settlement close to Ramallah, killing one Israeli civilian and injuring another. While claims of responsibility have not been confirmed, some Palestinian factions, including Hamas, praised the attack, which the United Nations immediately condemned. On 22 June, an Israeli policeman was critically wounded when he was stabbed at the Damascus Gate in Jerusalem. The attacker also remains in a critical condition after being shot by the policeman. In total, six members of the Israeli security forces were injured.

The Secretary-General remains deeply concerned about the situation of Palestinian prisoners in Israel, notably those in administrative detention, including Khader Adnan, detained since 8 July 2014, who has now been on hunger strike for 51 days. The Israeli Government's decision on 14 June to reintroduce draft legislation to permit the force-feeding of prisoners on hunger strike under certain conditions would, if approved by the Knesset, contravene international standards.

The demolition of homes and structures in the West Bank has also continued. This month, 52 structures, including 17 residences, were demolished, leading to the displacement of 29 Palestinians, including 17 children. On 9 June, the Israeli High Court of Justice rejected a petition to restore planning authority to Palestinian villages in Area C of the West Bank. The planning and zoning system as it stands makes it virtually impossible for Palestinians to build on or develop their land in Area C.

I reiterate our concerns over the fate of 7,000 Palestinian Bedouin and herders in 46 residential areas of the West Bank, who may be at risk of forcible transfer as Israel advances its plan to relocate these communities to three sites in Area C. The plan may be linked to settlement expansion in the E1 area and others, which would seriously jeopardize the two-State solution.

In the Gaza Strip, the desperate situation was exacerbated by a number of security incidents. During the reporting period, 10 rockets were fired by Palestinian militants from Gaza, thankfully without casualties or damage. The Secretary-General has publicly condemned those incidents. A further 11 rockets were test-fired towards the sea. The Israeli security forces responded by conducting 11 air strikes on militant sites in Gaza, again without resulting in injuries. Concerns are also mounting in relation to internal divisions within Gaza, including a potential developing threat from militant salafist individuals or groups. On 2 June, Hamas security forces reportedly killed a salafist accused of firing rockets at Israel and arrested a number of others suspected of carrying out those attacks. The Israeli security forces shot and injured 12 Palestinians. I call on Israel to implement measures to minimize incidents that result in injuries in the access-restricted areas on land and at sea.

The Secretary-General is closely following media reports that suggest that a flotilla is expected to group and head towards Gaza in the coming days. He continues to believe that a flotilla would not help to address the dire situation in Gaza and reiterates his calls for the Government of Israel to lift all closures, with due consideration of Israel's legitimate security concerns.

The ever-challenging circumstances in Gaza highlight the urgent need to strengthen Palestinian unity. Conflicts, poor governance and the closures have crushed Gaza's economy. Unemployment spiked to 43 per cent at the end of 2014.

I am nevertheless encouraged by Prime Minister Hamdallah's commitment to overcoming these obstacles, including the issue of public-sector employees in Gaza, by reintegrating the governance framework under a single authority. The willingness and capacity of all Palestinian factions to resolve their differences, including those related to border crossings with Israel and Egypt, is integral to lifting the blockade of Gaza and advancing Palestinian efforts to achieve statehood.

I note the 22 June decision of the Executive Committee of the Palestinian Liberation Organization to form a committee to consult with all Palestinian factions in order to form a national unity Government. I encourage all factions to maintain a positive approach to those discussions, which are critical to the future of Palestinian reconciliation.

The Secretary-General welcomed Egypt's decision, following consultations with President Abbas, to open the Rafah crossing from 13 to 19 June and for three days this week in both directions. Recognizing that such decisions critically depend on the security environment, and without diminishing the United Nations primary objective to see the full lifting of all the closures in the framework of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), it is our hope that the Rafah crossing can be opened on a regular basis to help relieve the suffering of the people of Gaza.

While overall progress in the reconstruction of Gaza remains far too slow, the establishment of the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism has been vital to facilitating the entry of material. As of 23 June, more than 88,500 homeowners have procured construction material. Furthermore, 135 construction projects out of 202 submitted have been approved by the Israeli authorities. I welcome today's approval by the Government of Palestine for the entry under the Mechanism of material for constructing 16,000 new homes to help address the housing gap.

With major construction work expected to begin imminently, there is an urgent need for additional funding for the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism, which will exhaust its funds in September.

The Secretary-General took note of the issuance on Monday of the report of the independent commission of inquiry established pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution S-21/1 (A/HRC/29/52). While we do not comment on the substance of such reports, it is our hope that the commission's report will contribute to bringing justice to victims of last year's war and encourage the parties to engage in serious and credible examinations of their own behaviour.

I will now say a few words about the situation in Lebanon and Syria.

Lebanon has now been without a president for over a year. The vacuum has prevented the Parliament from legislating on urgent issues and has thereby affected the economy and the Government's ability to function effectively. Since 4 June, Prime Minister Tammam Salam has suspended regular cabinet meetings to ease political tensions over upcoming senior appointments in the Lebanese armed forces. Along Lebanon's eastern

border with Syria, Hizbullah has reportedly seized a number of positions from armed extremist groups, including the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Daesh and the Al-Nusra Front, in the region of Qalamoun up to the outskirts of Arsal. The Lebanese armed forces have been deployed in and around Arsal to prevent the fighting from reaching the town.

Six months after the launch of the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan, we urge donors to fulfil existing pledges to assist the 1.2 million registered refugees and Lebanese host communities.

General calm remained in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, despite escalatory rhetoric on both sides and security concerns in the Golan Heights. Israel continued to violate Lebanese airspace on an almost daily basis.

Regarding Syria, the Secretary-General's Special Envoy continues the Geneva consultations with Syrian, regional and international delegations with a view to developing recommendations on the operationalization of the Geneva communiqué. On 4 June, he held discussions with the Syrian Opposition Coalition in Istanbul and from 15 to 17 June with Syrian officials in Damascus. In Damascus, he also raised issues related to the protection of civilians, including the unacceptable use of barrel bombs by Government forces, while also condemning the use of gas canisters by opposition groups.

The Turkish Government has raised concerns about refugee flows resulting from the efforts to oust ISIL from the Tal Abyad area in Syria. According to the information available to the United Nations, approximately 25,000 Syrians from that area sought refuge in Turkey, although we believe that 2,000 refugees have reportedly already crossed back into Syria. It is neither just nor possible to expect Turkey to continue to face those refugee pressures alone. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights is investigating allegations of forceful displacement of Arabs and Turkmen populations. To date, we are unaware of any evidence that it is taking place on a wide-scale or in a systematic way.

In conclusion, let me reiterate our concern that accepting a fatalistic narrative on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will only accelerate the deterioration of the situation. It will also constitute a grave injustice to those on both sides who want to live peacefully and securely as neighbours, as two peoples whose pasts will be forever linked by their ancestral ties to the region and whose futures stand only to benefit, including economically. Also, the conflict cannot be viewed in isolation from the regional turmoil. The risk of radicalization in the occupied Palestinian territory is heightened by the continued lack of a political horizon. Absent courageous leadership, a sustainable solution will remain a distant and unachievable goal.

The President: I thank Mr. Feltman for his briefing.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 3.20 p.m.